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STREET-BEGGING.

“Ye have the poor always with you,”

SAID the Great Teacher. There never has been a time, in any nation, when this was not true. Is it likely that anywhere, at any time, it will not be true? Even a superficial view of society will show that there are those who are really poor without blame. There are those who, for causes for which they are not responsible, and which they would gladly remove if they could, are not able, by any exertion in their power to make, to procure what is really needed. No political economy has been able to remove this social element, no religious culture has been able to eliminate it. It would seem as if the saying of the Great Teacher, with which this article opened, not only stated a fact, but also announced a general law of human society.

But there are the “poor” and the “paupers.” All paupers may be poor, but all poor are not paupers. There are those among the poor who are as gifted, as learned, as refined, as noble, as self-respecting, and as respectable as their richest fellow-citizens. A rich man may be rich because he is honorable, and a poor man may be poor because he is honorable. It shows a lack of knowledge, either of human society or of the English tongue, to say of any one that “he is poor, but honest.”

But paupers are ordinarily poor people whose poverty is due to themselves, and might be avoided if they were what they ought to be, and what, therefore, they might be. The word “ordinarily” is used because it is possible to conceive cases in which certain poor fall into the class of paupers for want of a delicacy which, perhaps, it would be too much to expect of them. Almost all beggars are paupers—not all, for some occasionally beg who cannot otherwise relieve their poverty ; but probably

ninety-nine of every hundred beggars prefer beggary to work, to even such work as they could perform, such work as is performed by many of those very persons from whom they solicit aid.

Let it be borne in mind that the worthy poor are to be helped, and the unworthy are to be cured. Let it also be recollected that the worthy poor almost never beg, and that out of every thousand beggars infesting the streets and visiting the houses of cities, probably not more than one is a proper subject for alms. All this may sound very harsh to those good souls who say to themselves that, having the comforts of life, it would be wicked in them to refuse a dime to a brother man who is in want, and who also say that it were better to help nine unworthy than suffer one worthy to go unhelped. But is it "help"? The gist of the question lies there. If a man prefer begging to work, and you keep him from work and at begging, are you "helping" that man? Are you not injuring that man and the whole community?

Street-beggars play on the feelings of those who are kindly disposed, and they understand the art of approaching good people on "the blind side." They form a fraternity bound together by certain ties of mutual helpfulness in their "business," and by certain signs which enable them to coöperate. If these men applied the same abilities with the same industry to lawful pursuits, they would make a legitimate livelihood. But they will not work. Nevertheless, they base their appeals usually on the ground that they cannot get work. They find you when they believe you have no employment for them, and then—"if they could only get work!" They know what will pass in your mind, and that finally you will give them money because you cannot give them work, and cannot bear to turn away a fellow man who is hungry, and who does not seem to have the means of winning bread. But if you will make some little contrivance in your house, which, while it is wholly unproductive, seems to have the semblance of work, and offer these men pay, you will soon discover the real state of the case.

A number of examples of this kind are known, but only two will be given, and the reader may be sure that they are perfectly authentic. A gentleman of high character and great generosity, who has a large manufacturing establishment in the city of

New York, conducted his business where it was very easy of access to beggars. They so interfered with his work and wrought upon his feelings, that he had recourse to the test of giving the applicants apparent employment. On the floor on which was his counting-room he had a pump erected, in full view of his desk. He did not need the pump. The water which was drawn ran off unused; but still it was some work to draw the water. As each beggar came, and was told he should work for his living, his pathetic reply was to the effect of, "Oh! if I could only find work." The pump was immediately proffered, and pay at a rate which would procure a night's lodging for an hour's work. He was told he could have that work every day until he found other employment. The suffering applicant was much obliged, but in one case he had a lame hand, and in another he had a friend at the door whom he must dismiss, so that he should not be kept waiting during the hour; but it seemed to take all the rest of the day to dismiss the "friend," as the applicant never came back. In other cases there were other excuses; and the upshot of the experiment was that, while a few accepted an hour's work at good pay, there was only one man who returned the second morning, and he never came back again.

The "Sisters of the Stranger" is an organization of ladies connected with the "Church of the Strangers" in New York. They do not so much furnish money as look after strangers, giving advice, helping in emergencies, protecting strangers from imposition, etc. But they do both give and lend money, as in their judgment is best. Some months ago the lady in charge had much writing on hand for the church, for the "Sisters of the Stranger," and for the "American Institute of Christian Philosophy," whose summer-school was approaching, and whose secretary she was helping. There came in an able-bodied man, who seemed to have some culture; but, according to his account, he could not find work enough to procure him a meal. The lady asked him to write his name. It was well done. She then proposed to give him good pay for making a number of copies of a circular then in hand. He sat down to his work not very graciously, and, after having worked about twenty minutes, doing about half the lady did in the same time, he received ample remuneration, but said, as he handed the papers to the lady: "Well, this is too humiliating! I'll never ask help again." Yet,

the next morning, the lady had occasion to visit her pastor, and found that same man at the door. He had come to beg food.

By all means now known, and to be hereafter discovered, this class of men must be taught that it is not true that the world owes them a living, as they are so fond of repeating, but that it is true that every man owes the world work, and, that if he will not pay this just debt, he is a scoundrel, and, so far from being an object of commiseration, is a subject for punishment. This evil is so great that all good men and women should unite to make every practicable exertion for its cure. In this article a few suggestions are made, some of which may be adopted by each reader :

1. Let the teaching in all our schools and churches go to the root of the matter. Every human being should be taught that he is born debtor, not creditor, to humanity; that, as in entering upon life he enters upon the enjoyment of a great estate laid up by foregone generations; that he is under a debt which can be paid only to the generations which succeed him; and that this can be done only by doing all he can for the generation in which he exists. It must be shown that the possession of great wealth excuses no one. The sons of the rich should feel their responsibility. The "gilded youth" of the avenue, the daintily dressed young fellows, who go months without a day of mental or manual labor, should be made to feel that they are the frilled "tramps" at one end of society, and no more to be respected by thoughtful men than the shirtless "tramps" at the other end. Indeed, it will be well to stir the consciences of the men who spend whole days in utter idleness, or sauntering or gazing vacantly from the windows of our fashionable club-houses, by agitating among them the question how far they are responsible for the street-beggars, who are often asking themselves the question why they should not be fed without work, seeing that their genteel brothers do not work, and yet fare sumptuously.

2. Let each resident of a city make himself acquainted with the societies already existing for the relief of the necessities of various classes, and as each applicant comes let him be sent to the institution provided for his case. The resident of New York, for instance, should examine the City Registry, p. 13, "Asylums and Homes," and p. 31, "Societies," Trow's City Directory. There are columns of names of organized and operative societies, covering almost all conceivable cases of need and

of suffering. If the applicant will not be helped by any of these, then he proclaims his unfitness for private beneficence.

3. Let each citizen select some society which has an arrangement for visiting and examining cases. To that special society let him send those who apply to him, stating frankly that he does not give pecuniary aid to any who are not known to him. The result will be that those who are willing to have their cases examined will apply to the society designated, and those who ought not to receive money aid will not apply; and, more than that, they will communicate to their whole tribe such information as will keep them from making application; and, still more, the society will be aided in carrying forward its work of practical and judicious beneficence. This can be done by having in your pocket a card with the name of the society upon it, and then when you are accosted on the street you need lose no time; you simply tell the applicant to carry that card to the place designated and all will be right. Probably, in a majority of cases, the card will be thrown away. But, let it be remarked, that any man of means who regularly sends his applicants for help to a society to whose treasury he has not contributed, is on a moral level with the man who habitually draws checks upon a bank in which he has no deposits.

4. Every good citizen should give some time to the attentive consideration of the poor who come under his own immediate observation. This he owes to himself. A rich man may set apart thousands of dollars annually to the maintenance of a corps of judicious and faithful investigators, who should distribute wisely to the poor tens of thousands of dollars of his wealth, and yet, if he do not put himself in brotherly communication with some poor man, deserving or undeserving, and strive by friendly advice and help to lift him to a self-supporting plane, he will lose all that blessedness which is promised to him that "considereth" the poor (Ps. xli. 1), and that reward which comes to him that "pitieth" the poor (Prov. xix. 17). It is to be observed that the word in the first of these passages means to act wisely toward the poor, and the word in the second means to behave graciously toward the poor, neither of which is complied with by mere money gifts; nor can any man, by pecuniary gifts, purchase exemption from the duty indicated in these words. Moreover, it will be instructive to follow up the people who appeal to you on the street or come to your house for cold vict-

nals. Not long ago a woman was in the work-house, leaving outside two little boys, the younger only three and the elder only seven years of age, who were compelled by several dissipated women to collect food and money for them, the money being spent by the women for liquor. Every child-beggar should be followed up. In most cases it would be found that the circumstances of these children called for the intervention of the "Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children." In many cases they will not allow you to accompany them; they are so early trained to roguery, that they will escape from you while seeming to be conducting you to their houses. Strangers in the city should make it a rule never to give on the streets, however pitiable the story and moving the appeal. The great majority of all beggars on our streets are "professional." They know whether you are from New England, or the South, or the West, or from a foreign country. They will catch you just when it will seem most heartless to deny them, for instance, late at night.

5. All good citizens should unite in seeing that wise laws are framed and promptly enforced against mendicancy, to the execution of which every man should be willing to contribute time and effort, as well as money. To every man who says "I would work if I could get work to do," should be given the reply of a house provided, to which he should be compelled to go, and where he would find some work which he should be compelled to do. The product of the work probably would not meet the expenses of the establishment, but the balance could be procured by enlisting the interest of philanthropic men of means.

In discussions of this complex and important subject, it is always to be borne in mind that what it is desirable to vacate is not the poverty of the poor, nor the correlative burden-bearing of the rich. Neither of these is intolerable. Neither of these is hurtful to the individual, or to society. Pauperism is that which hurts society at large, by diminishing the general wealth and by injuring the character of the individual. What must we do to eliminate that which produces pauperism? First, we must abstain from everything which tends to offer a premium to those who are willing to live off the toil of others; and second, we must strive to destroy that willingness in individual cases by moral reform.

The worthy poor will always remain; but the poor who have the greatest claim upon our regard will never beg. They

will perish in silence. These must be found. We must so cultivate our spiritual and moral senses that we shall become quick to detect the needs of others, and swift to relieve. That class we should have no wish to put out of human society.

The unworthy poor are to be helped as well, but differently. Money is not help to them. They need moral culture. It is our duty to impart it to them; but it is a difficult duty to perform. Most pastors in the city will probably tell you that they can more easily obtain hundreds of dollars from their prosperous parishioners to scatter among the poor, than they can persuade one parishioner to give one afternoon in exerting moral influence over the vicious poor.

The third class, the thriftless and incompetent, are the most difficult to deal with. Patient instruction is what they need. But it is so irksome for a man of robust and energetic character to tolerate those who are born inefficient. He succeeds; why should not they? This is the question which the successful ask. He who has never had any sickness can have no conception of the burden which that man bears who has a secret malady or a perpetual invisible weakness; much less can he have sympathy. As it is with the body, so is it with the character. Wherefore we are taught by the highest authority that "we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Romans xv. 1). Life will never be without its burdens, and to all classes comes the apostolic injunction, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. vi. 2). And "the law of Christ" is the highest law known in theoretical ethics and in practical good living.

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